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GREAT BRITAIN'S SHARE

BY

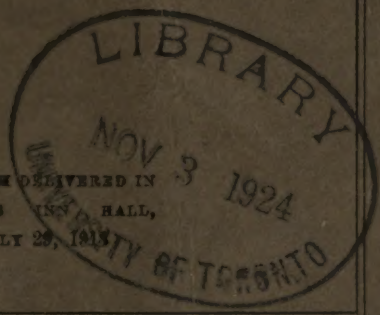
EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G.

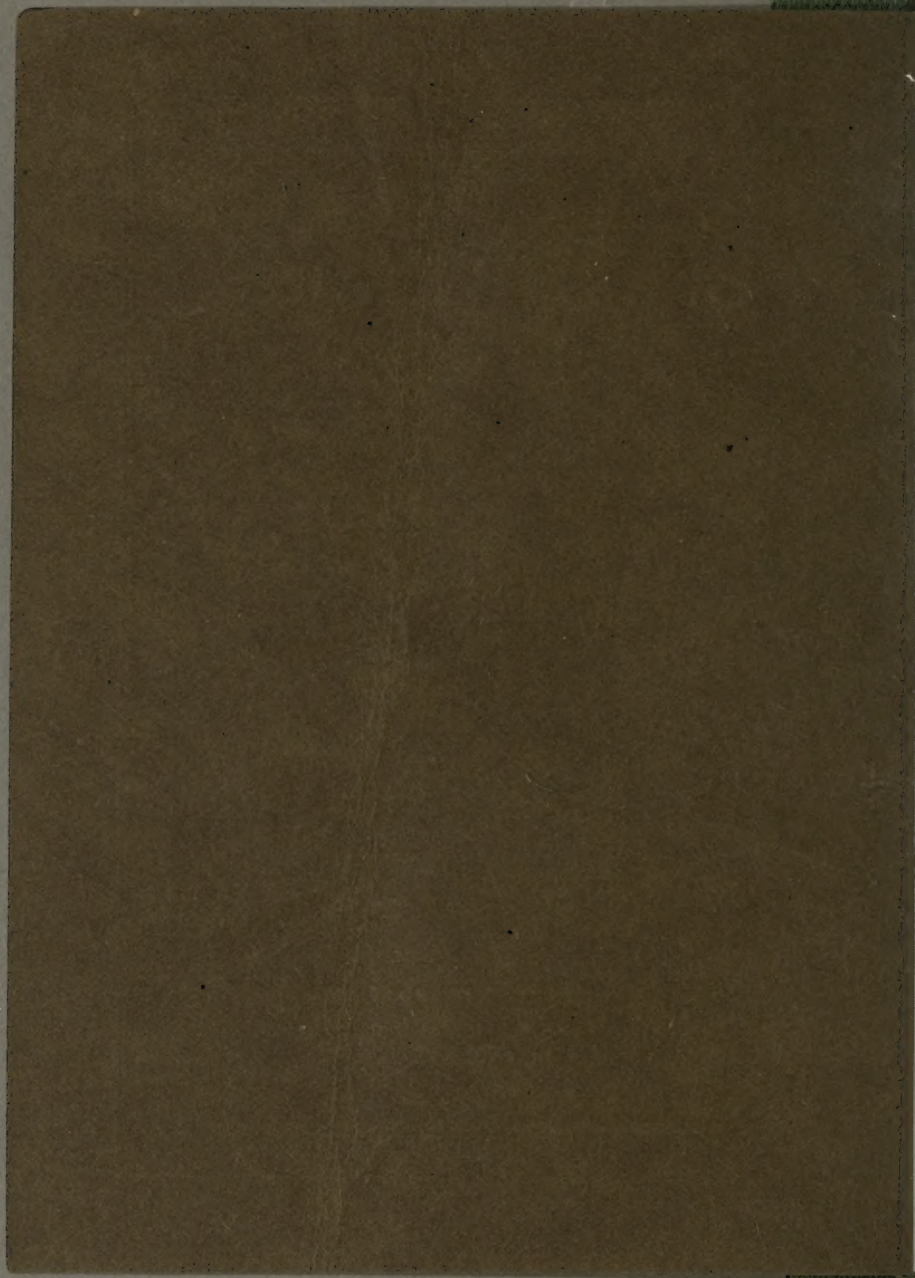
(Member of the War Cabinet)

SPEECH DELIVERED IN

GRAY'S INN HALL,

JULY 29, 1918





GREAT BRITAIN'S SHARE

BY

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G.
(Member of the War Cabinet)

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NATIONAL WAR AIMS COMMITTEE

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GREAT BRITAIN'S SHARE.

I SPEAK at a moment of great significance in the history of the War. I am not so foolish as to suggest that we are at the turning-point of the War; to say that would be to indulge in premature and foolish jubilation. But it is conceivable that the events of the last fortnight may be destined to exercise an influence on the whole course of the campaign not less remarkable than the original and famous battle of the Marne four years ago. For what has passed? After their great successes in March, April, and May, the enemy was in a position which constituted a serious menace equally to the Channel Ports, to the continued junction and co-operation of the French and British Armies, and to the capital city of France. The initiative rested with him; he could choose both the point and the moment of attack; he could support it anywhere with superior numbers; neither the

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French nor ourselves could retreat without the risk of serious disaster. Ludendorff and Hindenburg had promised their countrymen the luxury of a knock-out blow. That blow has been delivered and has failed. The enemy has lost more ground than he gained in the opening days of his last offensive. He has lost in prisoners, wounded, and killed, a larger number, in all probability, than we have any idea of. He has lost the initiative. But the greatest loss of all is the blow that has been inflicted upon the *moral* of his troops and the prestige of his country. Of course he still has very considerable reserves. His military position and his prestige are equally at stake, and he will make every endeavour to retrieve the position. It is too early to talk of victory, too early to imagine that the enemy is beaten; but it is true that the situation has changed. There is a break in the clouds and the sun is riding high in the heavens.

FRENCH GENERALSHIP.

This change in the situation has been due, in the main, apart from the uniform gallantry of

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the fighting forces of the Allies, to two factors: firstly, to the strategy of General Foch, and, secondly, to the magnificent response of America. In General Foch the Allies would appear to have found a Generalissimo—a few months ago we boggled at the name, but we now confidently and gratefully accept it—who combines those qualities of accurate intuition, quick decision, great moral courage, and the power of inspiring his troops with confidence which have been characteristics of the great commanders in history.

AMERICAN AID

In America we have found an Ally of whom we are proud, and who has every reason to be proud of herself. For nearly three years, for reasons best known to themselves, which we do not presume to criticise, the Americans held aloof from a war in which the sympathies of the vast majority of their people were always on our side. Rather more than a year ago they came in. Then ensued a period in which little or nothing seemed to be done. Disappointment

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was expressed by their friends, gibes and jeers were indulged in by the enemy. But with the events that began on March 21 the American effort leapt up at a bound. The lid was taken off the cauldron which had been simmering for so long, and from it a flood of red-hot manhood, boiling over with virile energy and righteous indignation, was poured forth on to the battle-grounds of Europe. Such a spectacle has never before been seen in history. It came so suddenly. It was not the appearance of a regiment, of an army corps, of an army, but of a nation in arms. The effect was electric. The material value was enormous in changing the enemy's superiority, first to a state of equality, and secondly, as time passes, to one of numerical inferiority. The military and strategical value was great, in converting a rearguard action into an active counter-offensive. But the moral value was greatest of all in its effect upon the spirit both of the enemy and of the Allies. And this will be a cumulative effect, for, as the months pass by and hundreds of thousands of splendid

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men are landed on the shores of France, the Allies will be heartened and the enemy will be correspondingly depressed in the later stages of the War.

TRANSPORTATION OF AMERICAN TROOPS.

I invite you to consider how this great acceleration of American effort has been effected. First let us pay our tribute to President Wilson for his foresight and courage, so much greater than our own, in the early introduction of compulsory military service in America, which enabled the men to be forthcoming. Nor must we forget the steps which he took to seize German shipping in American harbours and to build up American shipping as well. All this is true, but it is also true that this great feat of transportation, which has changed the face of the War and given promise of ultimate victory, could never have been accomplished but for the British Navy and British shipping. We were told the other day that more than 1,000,000 American troops have been landed in France, the great majority of them in the last few

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months. Let me tell you that nearly 60 per cent. of these have been brought by British tonnage.* In this month (July) alone we are carrying 200,000 American soldiers to France. In April we had fifty-six ships bringing American troops. In the month of July we have had 170. This great procession of ships, crossing thousands of miles of ocean in regular formation, presenting a large and visible target for attack, hunted and harried as they enter the danger zone by an invisible and desperate foe, but guarded by an ever-moving screen for the most part of British destroyers and British men-of-war, and weekly landing its complement of men in the ports of England and France, is one of the most impressive spectacles of the War. It reflects equal credit upon the British Navy, who have guarded the passage and held off the enemy; upon the Minister of Shipping, whose consummate organisation and efficient handling of tonnage have been mainly responsible for the supply of ships;

* Of the 305,000 American troops brought over in July, 1918, more than 61 per cent. (188,600 men) were transported in British ships.

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and lastly, upon the captains and men of the British Mercantile Marine. If ever a new edition is required of Captain Mahan's immortal work, a chapter may well be added on this convincing demonstration of what sea-power means.

BRITISH CONTRIBUTION TO THE ALLIED CAUSE.

But this is only one illustration of the contribution that has been made by Great Britain, unadvertised, for the most part unseen, and often quite unknown, to the Allied cause. I pass over the fact that, alone of the Allies, we are fighting no fewer than seven campaigns, some of them at a distance of many thousands of miles from our shores—France and Flanders, Italy, Salonica, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Persia, and E st Africa. I pass over the more than 8,000,000 men whom we have raised in this country for all the purposes of war. I say nothing of the 3,000,000 British soldiers who are now serving abroad. Not one of these men is

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fighting on British soil. Each one of them is risking his life—thousands of them have already shed their lifeblood—for the defence and the emancipation of foreign peoples and foreign lands. Truly we may be said to have proved ourselves the knights-errant of civilisation. I do not wish to speak of that. I wish to speak rather of our contribution to the success of others. We are so deservedly loud in praise of the splendid efforts of our Allies that we are apt to forget our own virtues. There is much to be said for the saving grace of humility, but it is a doctrine that is capable of being pushed too far. I submit to you that we are entitled to a good conceit of ourselves. I cannot imagine a more interesting subject for an essay than a summary of the contributions that have been made in so many directions by Great Britain to the common cause. I have in my own mind a sketch of how such a statement might be framed. I would point out that this country is the feeder, the clothier, the carrier, the banker, the armourer, the Universal Provider of all our Allies.

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BRITISH AID TO FRANCE.

Take the case of France alone. We cannot sufficiently express our admiration for the spirit and resolution with which the people of France have over and over again resisted and repelled the invasions of the enemy. We admire her veteran and indomitable Prime Minister, the skill of her commanders, the bravery of her troops, the patriotism and self-sacrifice of her citizens. We are proud to fight by their side and in their cause. But, without our aid, this superb effort could never have been made or sustained. Last year we carried to France 45 per cent. of her entire imports, and the same proportion to Italy. We carry to her shores over 50 per cent. of the coal by which her furnaces and forges, her railways and arsenals are fed.* We carry over 60 per cent. of the cereals by which her armies and her civil population are kept alive. We have at this

* The coal supplied to France and Belgium during the war period up to the end of June, 1918, amounted to 67,349,000 tons, and Italy had received from us 20,633,000 tons.

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moment 1,000,000 tons of shipping in the service of France, and half a million tons in the service of Italy. We carry to France an enormous amount of the railway material which she uses, the steel and iron—no fewer than 2,000,000 tons of the latter in the last year and a half—of machine-guns and trench mortars, and every variety of munitions of war, including no fewer than 120,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition in the year 1917.* This has nothing to do with the British army in France. We supply her with the blankets, the socks, the woollen cloths, the cotton and jute, with which her people are clothed.† We are responsible for the entire supply of petrol and frozen meat which are required for her forces at Salonica.

BRITISH AID TO ALL THE ALLIES.

And what we have done for her we have done, and are doing, for all the Allies. Since

* The total amount of steel sent by us to France from the outbreak of the war up to the end of the first half of 1918 was 1,827,000 tons.

† Four million blankets have been supplied during the war to France and nearly four millions to Italy.

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the beginning of the war we have carried 24,000,000 tons of stores for the Allies alone. The total value in the last year of the goods which we have supplied on special contract for the Allies has amounted to £17,000,000. To Italy, apart from our fighting Army, we have sent thousands of guns and machine-guns, hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition, and an immense quantity of explosives. The bootmakers of Northampton and Kettering and Leicester have supplied the greater part of the footgear with which the Allied Armies are shod.* Since the beginning of the War they have turned out 60,000,000 pairs of boots. Similarly, the mills of Yorkshire, Huddersfield, Bradford, Leeds, and many other places have furnished the clothing with which the Allied Armies are clad. The Serbian soldier, who will shiver during the forthcoming winter in the high-lands of Monastir, wears a fur coat and cap that comes from Great Britain. The Rumanian

* 2,153,000 pairs of boots have been supplied to France during the war (up to and including June, 1918). In the same period Italy has had from us 1,462,000 pairs.

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soldier, before the collapse of his country, wore a British shirt. We have supplied 2,000,000 respirators to the Italian Army to enable them to breathe the air of victory in the forthcoming twelve months. To Russia, as Lord Milner could tell you, we sent 700 guns and howitzers, 12,000,000 rounds of ammunition, and thousands of sets of artillery harness, the greater part of them, alas! engulfed in the appalling morass in which the destinies of that unhappy country have been plunged. The Chinese coolie who works behind the lines in France, the Kaffir boy from the Cape, the Portuguese and the Siamese soldier fighting with the Allies—each wears a British-made dress or uniform. In this contribution great credit is due to our Dominions over the seas, to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, who allowed us to purchase their wool clip for the purpose of the war. Nor must I forget the Royal Air Force, which supplied a training staff, machines, engines and accessories to our Allies in every part of the world, including as many as 700 completed aeroplanes.

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SERVICE OF THE BRITISH NAVY.

How have we been able to do this? The whole of this economic service depends upon our command of the seas. It has been secured by the predominance of the British Navy.* Had we lost command of the sea we could not have helped our Allies to fight; we could not even have kept our own population alive. The Navy has kept the seas open for the Mercantile Marine, and the Mercantile Marine has been the life-preserver of our Allies.

BRITISH FINANCIAL AID.

In this enumeration I had almost forgotten the financial assistance which we have been

* Mr. Lloyd George informed the House of Commons, on August 7, that the tonnage of the British Navy had been 2,500,000 in August, 1914, and would be 8,000,000 (including the Auxiliary Fleet) in August, 1918. In one month (June, 1918) ships of the British Navy steamed 8,000,000 miles. The number of men required to man and maintain the Navy and the Mercantile Marine exceeds 1,500,000. The British Navy has destroyed at least 150 enemy submarines.

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enabled to render. This "nation of shop-keepers" has kept open shop for the entire world. But we have also been the bankers who have placed them in funds. I recall that only a few days ago the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated in the House of Commons that since the beginning of the war we have advanced £1,370,000,000 to our Allies, and £206,000,000 to the Dominions.* British credit has been the mainstay of the alliance. Our advances have relieved them of the necessity of raising funds in their own countries. Our credit has enabled them to obtain supplies of raw material, of food, and the implements of war from all the world.†

* By August 1, 1918, the amount of the loans to the Allies had risen to £1,402,000,000. Of this total, £119,000,000 had been lent to the smaller States of the Alliance (Belgium, Serbia, Rumania, Greece, etc.); Italy's debt was £313,000,000, France's was £402,000,000, and Russia's was £568,000,000. The amount advanced to the British Dominions was £208,500,000 up to that date.

† The Chancellor of the Exchequer has pointed out that the Allies were able to use British loans to obtain Foreign currency required for urgent supplies from

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The financing of our Allies for the past four years has, in fact, been one of the great achievements of the war. Nor can it be said that we have done this for selfish reasons or for profit to ourselves. Had we not been manufacturing for our Allies we should have been manufacturing for export and for the upkeep of our own trade. To help others we have temporarily dislocated our trade. Some branches of it have been altogether ruined. We have had to reduce our own consumption and to ration our coal—and how serious that sacrifice has been the forthcoming winter will show. We have had to sell or pledge British securities and to incur severe losses in foreign countries.

BRITISH CONTRIBUTION IN MEN.

I have spoken of the contribution that we have made in respect of shipping, of material, and of money. Do not let us forget the sacrifice

neutral countries, especially from the United States in the first three years of the war. Thus they could obtain dollars in America or florins in Holland against British credit and British securities.

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of men. We are sometimes reproached for the number of men who are kept in this country. They are retained here not to defend our shores, but because they are carrying out invaluable and necessary service for our Allies. At the present time there are 260,000 men in this country engaged solely in industrial service for the Allies. Of the 375,000 men who are employed in digging coal, of the 1,000,000 men who are engaged in industrial work for the Admiralty, of the 1,500,000 men who are employed by my friend the Minister of Munitions on munition work, a large proportion are working not for us alone, but for the Allies as well. When we contemplate this accumulated effort, the most gigantic that this country has ever put forth, the wonder is that our military effort has been so great, and that, in addition to taking so large a share in the joint campaigns, we have been able to conduct three or four separate campaigns as well.

WAR AIMS.

I submit that this great effort should be equally known to our own people and to our

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Allies. I doubt if, at present, it is at all adequately recognised by either. In four years it has built up the great fabric of military resistance which has enabled us to hold the enemy in check in Europe and to throw him back in defeat and disaster in so many other parts of the world. It finds us, after four years, weary, it is true, of war, because no one would wish to protract for an hour longer than is necessary so agonising a struggle for which so terrible a price has had to be paid. It finds us anxious for peace, provided it is the kind of peace to which we can honourably consent. But it also finds us with unabated resolution, with a fidelity to our friends and Allies which has never for a moment been shaken, and with a determination, which we share with them, to persevere without relenting until we attain the common goal. At the beginning of the fifth year of war we go forward with pride in our achievements, with gratitude to our own people and to our Dominions for the splendid response that they have made to our appeal, and with unaltered confidence in the

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justice and righteousness of our cause. Do I err if I say that there also enters into our hearts some spirit of exaltation that transcends the din of the workshops, the roar of the battle-field, and enables us to vanquish the worries and troubles of our every-day life? We feel that we are fighting for something bigger than the War itself, bigger, even, than the peace by which we hope it will be followed. A new world is in process of being built up out of the smoking and battered ruins of the old; and it will be a pride to those of us who are privileged to play a part in these great events that we have been among the architects and masons who are setting up this edifice. If that be so, it will be our consolation for all our efforts and losses and sacrifices: it will be to us a great and crowning and sufficient reward.

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